

# THE WABASH EXPRESS

OFFICE EAST OF THE COURT-HOUSE.

D. S. DANALDSON, Editor.

TERRE-HAUTE.

Wednesday Morning, April 27, 1853.

A reliable, competent, and steady Foreman is wanted immediately at this office.

## THE GREAT STORM.

On Saturday evening last, at about half past seven o'clock, our place was visited by a storm of wind, hail, rain, thunder and lightning, which, we presume, has been more disastrous in its effects than any thing of the kind heretofore passing over Terre-Haute. It came from the west, with a roar that was terrifying, but before any time for reflecting, it was upon us with all its terror and destruction. For a short time, the hail came down in great numbers and size, and many houses with western exposures lost their window glass ruinously. The hail, however, did not last long, and the principal injury was caused by the violence of the wind. We hear that Mr. Thompson's new steam mill was stripped of a large part of its tin covering, so also the new grocery house of Bement & Co. Three new frames, in the South part of town, not weather-boarded yet, were torn to the ground, a wood shed turned top down and broken to pieces, the roof and west wall of Mr. Holm's mill were somewhat damaged, a two-story old frame belonging to H. Button, on First and Oak streets, was piled up in the street, and the roof of the large corn crib, belonging to E. W. Smith, was taken off, and many other houses, in that direction, more or less injured.

We heard of a small frame house of D. Porterfield's, which was literally "scattered to the winds." Chimney tops, in various places, were blown over, among which we noticed some on the Linton block, some on J. D. Early's store rooms, Dr. Patrick's, G. W. Ball's, &c. The balustrade on the roof of J. D. Early's residence, was broken loose and moved about a yard eastwardly, lodging on the roof on one end.

The greatest damage, however, was done to Mr. Jewett's Congregationalist Church. The Sexton was ringing the bell at the time, for assembling the congregation, when the cupola was blown over eastwardly, and falling on the roof broke its way through to the pews below, making a good wreck of some of the old furniture.

Recent Shows in Terre-Haute. — Mr. R. J. Turner, who advertises himself as the great American Balladist, and the Riley Family have recently been singing in this place. We hope they did not feel ashamed when they read the bespattering bestowings upon them, as thick as it was laid on in some places. In regard to success, of course they will be glad to return occasionally to Terre-Haute.

Spalding & Roger's floating circus was at our landing Saturday, and exhibited at 2 o'clock, to a beggarly account of fifty boxes, though they have the best arrangements for the comfort of the audience of any thing of the kind we have seen, and the performance was generally excellent. The Acrobat and his two little sons, and the man of the bells, rings and daggers, were certainly adepts in their several vocations.

We hear from one of the Town officers, that no license was collected from said circus, on the discovery, as is said, that the ordinance affixing the price, contains no penalty for exhibiting without license. This is true as far as it goes; but we think it is not enough to be available. The ordinance of August 3, 1851, merely fixes the price of license for certain exhibitions, but it does not repeal the ordinance of April 20, 1841, which affixes the penalty for exhibiting a circus without a license at sixty dollars a day, for each day they may so exhibit. See the ordinances printed in 1841, and the Terre-Haute Journal of August 22, 1851. We understand Mr. Turner escaped a trial of said question "license or no license" from the same cause. The above remarks apply also (according to the ordinance) in singing cases, as well as any others. The ordinance of April 20, 1841, put the penalty for singing ("amusements for gain") at ten dollars for each day's exhibition.

In this circus case, we think we have seen newspaper articles which stated, that the floating circus, being always on our rivers, which are national highways, had a license from the United States which covered them and nullified all others; or, that they occupy rivers only, the navigation of which no State or town has a right to restrict. We are certain some question of this kind has arisen and been tried perhaps at Madison, Ind., and on the Mississippi, and we think the circus avoided any town or county license. We would like to see it tested here.

In singing cases it is questionable whether Towns have a right to charge for such things. Our Charter gives the right to tax "exhibitions of every kind" which seems broad enough to cover singing; but the state laws extend only to "caravans, circuses, rope or wire dancing, legendmain, and puppet shows." Music and

The Morning Journal. — This is the new name for the Daily State Journal, at Indianapolis, which came to us on Monday last, dressed in new type, with a new head, &c. The paper is much improved, and we think all will admire its neat appearance. Having made a new arrangement, J. D. Defrees is to be the editor in future, assisted by Jas. H. McNeely, and as to the practical part and business affairs, the paper contains the following:

The Press room is under the control of Mr. WILLIAM S. CAMERON, a gentleman who has been raised in a Printing office, and who has a complete knowledge of the business. The job department is managed by Mr. WILLIAM CRAVENS, who has had much experience in one of the best Book and Job offices in Cincinnati. — Mr. GEORGE ARMOR, recently from the Cincinnati Gazette, attends to the newspaper department of the composition room and brings to it the aid of many years experience in the best offices in the country. Mr. THEO. P. HAUSKEY, an experienced book keeper, has charge of the Counting-room, to whom all those having business to transact, are referred.

We wish the greatest success to the "Morning Journal," under the new arrangement.

17 We understand from some gentlemen recently returned from Washington city, that office-begging still goes bravely on, begging all description. The times of Taylor, Polk and Harrison are nothing to the present pressure, and Mr. Pierce has no peace of his life, being dogged the live-long day, and part of the night, or as often as any of the legion can gain admittance. The democracy are remarkably hungry, and we fear will ultimately disgrace themselves, if not bring odium upon the nation. Back out, gentlemen, and let the President alone; he has other work besides pensioning the incompetent from the public Treasury.

17 Mr. WOOLLEN, recently of the Madison Banner, is corresponding occasionally for said paper, from "Cedar Cliff," in Kentucky, we take it, from his first article. We shall look for your "songs or sermons," Bro. W. with much interest. Send 'em along, from the shady retreat, the wood embowered cottage you have chosen to be happy in. We should like to be retired with you, if we could get rattles and elo' on a never-ending cred.

17 It is understood that the Board of Directors of the Railroad from Vincennes to this place, have adopted for their line, what is known as the Carlisle route. We do not know where said line enters Vigo, or Terre-Haute, but we suppose, of course, it is the most practicable and easiest constructed route, and that the most stock has been subscribed on said line.

Correspondence.

St. Paul, Minn.

Fired Danthelion. — The Old-Father of War upon us, which is a grass so finely, that most entirely of getting bore below. But we and are anxiously expect first boat.

The Great Slave. — winter, is making progress up the Minnesota, and it is hard for the one who wish to jump of the upper trip before those wishing to get to that he will be sure to he gets there.

The great anxiety to the new purchases, commenced in good earnest.

You would probably tell you that more red hands within the erse Des Sioux, (prison alone, besides the towns, or rather towns needed so much activity, hilled here now. Be about the matter, then wait till next fall or ready here, and are a wagon, or a wheel-bar, they will not get the more anxious than it have the "last lick."

Having taken the M such an alarming diges you, I expect to be safely landed on the Minnesota, at the "C erse Des Sioux," where future residence, the I should live so long.

This place is about 120 miles by water, 80 by land—a country as it will be established missioners, to be elected will live in or near no other settlement intent, can safely say.

The price of lots the highest I have seen some are held at \$ Square, \$25 or \$30.



The steeple with but some slight injury. The building is generally so much wrecked as to preclude the idea of ever being usefully repaired. A loss of course to the congregation of several thousand dollars.

The force of the storm was more or less felt over the whole town. Chimneys were blown down from many buildings—two on the Methodist church, one on the dwelling of Dr. Patrick, another from a new building of Geo. W. Ball. The large platform on the top of J. D. Early's house was started from its place. Several new buildings in the way of erection were razed to the ground. The roofs of Mr. Thompson's Steam Mill and cement & Co.'s store were much injured. As for smaller matters, we may notice that a number of hats were blown away and still remain among the missing. One gentleman on the prairie started after his *chapeau* but never had the pleasure of even a sight of it; others were obliged to lay flat on the ground. One had his hat carried away, and was seen holding on to a fence to hold himself down.

Altogether, the roaring of the wind, flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and rattling of hail made the storm of Saturday a scene not soon to be forgotten by many of the citizens of Terre Haute.

#### SCHOOL MEETING.

A meeting on the subject of taxes for school buildings &c. was held in the Court House on Monday afternoon last. Judge Kinney in the Chair, and Mr. Soule Secretary. The meeting was very respectable in character and numbers in attendance. Resolutions were passed authorizing a tax of 20 cts. on the hundred dollars, and also a capitation tax of 50 cts. for the purpose of the schools, buildings &c. A resolution was also adopted authorizing the School Trustees, to purchase the Seminary building and lot, at a reasonable price, at the sale advertised of the same.

#### TRUSTEES OF W. & E. CANAL.

The New York papers announce the re-appointment of CHARLES BUTLER and THOMAS DOWLING as Trustees of the Wabash & Erie Canal, on the part of the Bondholders. This is a decided compliment, and a full proof of the confidence entertained in the ability and fidelity of the gentlemen, in superintending and conducting the multifarious and important affairs of that great work.

Mr. Soule's early career will, it is said be a bar to his cordial reception at the Spanish Court as Minister of the United States.

#### NAMES OF STREETS.

There is sometimes a little confusion as to the names of two or three of our streets. Wabash street is occasionally termed National Road, or Main street. And Market, is frequently called Third street, &c. We were taken to task last week for speaking of Main and Third streets, names which we have often heard applied.

We will here give the names of the streets as placed on the original plat of the town. The streets running North and South, beginning and counting from the river, are as follows to wit:—*Water, First, Second, Market, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth.*

The streets running East and West, counting from the North or upper end of the town are named as follows, to wit:—*Sycamore, Eagle, Mulberry, Cherry, Wabash, Ohio, Walnut, Poplar, Swan, Oak.* Sycamore being the extreme North, and Oak the extreme South on the original plat. The Court House Square being situated between Wabash and Ohio streets, running East and West—and between Second and Market, running North and South.

**FLOATING PALACE.**—The great Floating Palace made its appearance at our wharf on Saturday last, agreeably to advertisement. Performance took place afternoon and evening, and for once we are willing to say that a Circus exhibition came fully up to what it advertised and professed to be and do. The accommodations and seats for an audience are the best and genteelst we have ever seen. The performances too, were excellent—altogether superior to those land traveling Circuses usually exhibiting in this place.

We learn that the *Floating Palace* will be again at our wharf this (Saturday) afternoon on its return from Lafayette, and that the company will perform afternoon and evening—2 and 7 o'clock.

**THE SEARCH FOR SIR JOHN FRANKLIN.**—Dr. Kane, who has expressed great confidence that Sir John Franklin and his companions are still alive, will sail on another expedition in search of them about the 15th of May, in the brig *Advance*, furnished him by Mr. Grinnell, of New York. The whole expenses will be borne by individual contributions. Congress having failed to make any appropriation. The vessel is provisioned for a three years' voyage, and every convenience provided for the comfort of the men at sea and on land. We wish them success.

E. W. H. ELLIS, Secy.  
W. H. CHURCHMAN, Superintendent.

**Vice President of the United States.**  
The office of Vice President has been previously vacant on the following occasions, viz:—Twice by the death of the Vice Presidents, viz: Geo. Clinton April, 1812; his term expiring March 3, 1813. Elbridge Gerry, November 1814; his term expiring March 3. Once by the resignation of John C. Calhoun, Dec. 28, 1832; his term expiring March 3, 1833. Twice by the death of Presidents Harrison and Taylor, the consequent accession of Vice Presidents Tyler and Fillmore to the Presidency; the former in April, 1841, the latter in July 1850; leaving the Presidency vacant for the remainder of their respective terms, and the President of the Senate with the right of succession to the Presidency. The powers and duties of the Vice President of the Senate *pro tem.*, are precisely the same, except the latter votes as a senator, and has the casting vote. Archibald, the present President of the Senate, *pro tem.*, has only two years to serve as U. S. Senator.

**THE SANDWICH ISLANDS.**—A recent census of the Sandwich Islands exhibits facts of startling interest, and which illustrate in the most unmistakable manner a vital law that the inferior race must give way to the stronger. The present population of the seven islands forming the group is 80,641. The deaths during last year were 7,943, while the births were only 1478, an average of six deaths to one birth. The cipher number only 1787. This is a extraordinary state of things, and we wonder whether the parallel can be found in the history of the world. In the time of Columbus this people numbered 400,000; thus in only twenty years they have decreased 320,000. In 1836 they numbered 108,550—decreasing in seventeen years nearly 28,000. So rapid a decrease of native population is a very melancholy spectacle. At the present rate of decrease, another generation hardly have passed away ere this people will be blotted from the face of the earth. *Boston Journal.*

**BIRTH DAY OF HENRY CLAY.**—The April 12, the birthday of Henry Clay celebrated by the citizens of Lexington. The *Observer* gives the following account of the celebration:—  
\*The day was ushered in by the firing of cannon and the ringing of bells, and at 10 o'clock a procession was formed under the direction of Gen. Leslie Combs, as

Wabash Courier

April 30, 1853 p 2



Friday for Vera  
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BURG, April 4.  
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death.

LEXIA, April 4.  
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court took a re-

**Presidents at the inauguration.**

Inaugurated.	Age.
April 30, 1789	37
March 4, 1797	62
March 4, 1801	58
March 4, 1809	58
March 4, 1817	56
March 4, 1825	57
March 4, 1833	63
March 4, 1837	54
March 4, 1841	68
March 4, 1845	49
March 5, 1849	64
March 4, 1853	49

Presidents when elect-  
ident John Tyler  
Fillmore 80 years  
d of succeeding to  
the death of the  
and Taylor.

ment 4. destitution 4. disappointment  
in love 7. too much study 3. fright 2.  
temper 2. pride 2. imprisonment 2. pe-  
nuriousness 1. The rest are mainly  
from diseases or physical causes. Of  
the \$80 000 expended only some \$8000  
were received from the State. Counties  
and towns have paid \$36 000. and pri-  
vate patients \$29 000. The institution  
is altogether in a flourishing state.

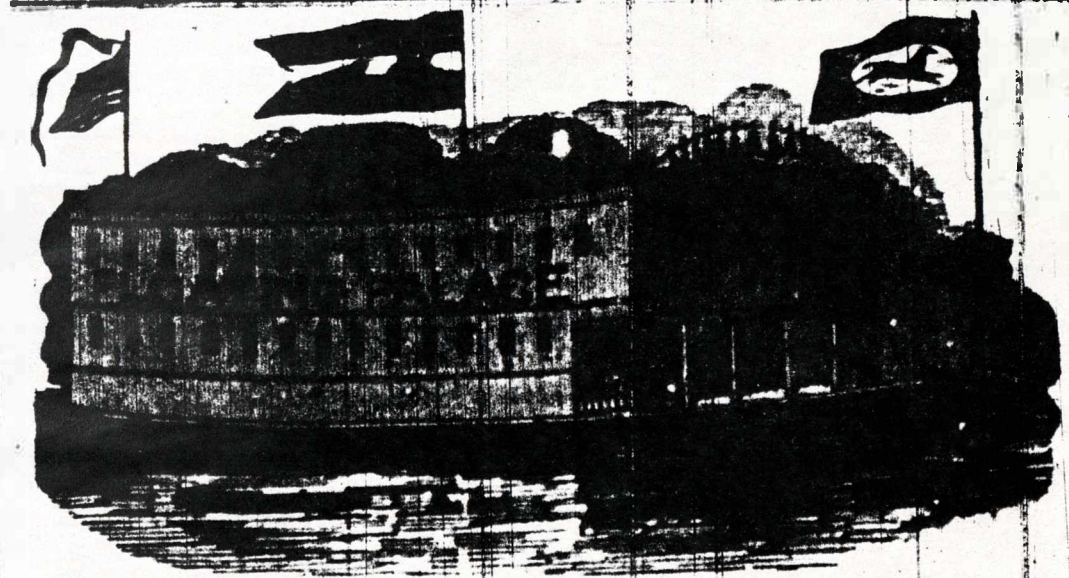
"Wife! wife!—our cow's dead; choked  
with a turnip." "I told you so. I always  
said she'd choke herself with the turnips."  
"But it was a pumpkin—" "Wal, it's all the  
same. I knowed all along how it would be.  
Nobody but a manny like you would feed  
a cow on pumpkins that wasn't chopt."—  
"The pumpkins was chopt. And I wan't  
the pumpkin's neither that choked her.—  
It was the tray—and the end of it is stick-  
ing out of her mouth now." "Ugh! Ugh!  
There goes my bread tray! No longer  
than yesterday. I told you that the cow would  
swallow that tray!"

One hundred divorce cases are now on  
the docket in Cincinnati.

**Administrator's Notice**  
NOTICE is hereby given that the under-  
signed has taken letters of administra-  
tion on the estate of Charles Edington, late  
of Fayette township, Vigo county and State  
of Indiana, deceased. All persons indebted  
to the estate are requested to make immedi-  
ate payment, and those having claims against  
the same are notified to present them duly  
authenticated for settlement. The estate  
probably solvent.

JONATHAN WHITEZELL,  
April 2, '53 32-3t Administrator.

**Administrator's Sale.**  
NOTICE is hereby given that I will expose to  
public sale on Tuesday the 26th of April,  
1853, at the residence of Charles Edington, late of  
Fayette township, Vigo county, deceased, the per-  
sonal property of said deceased, consisting of  
three head of horses, several head of cattle, wag-  
on and buggy and farming utensils, about 16  
acres of wheat in ground, a lot of Dry Goods and  
Queenware, one set of China, one bureau, beds  
and bedding, with a variety of household and  
kitchen furniture. A credit of nine months will  
be given on all sums over three dollars; the pur-  
chaser giving note with approved security, col-  
lectable without any relief from valuation or ap-  
praisement laws. Sale to commence at 10 o'clock  
A. M. JONATHAN WHITEZELL,  
April 2, '53 32-3t Administrator.



# SPALDING & RODGERS CIRCUS CO. ON BOARD FLOATING PALACE,

WILL Exhibit in Terre Haute on Saturday, April 23d, at 2 and 7 o'clock, P. M.

**PRICE OF ADMISSION.**

Dress Circle, all armed Chairs	50 cents
Family Boxes, Cushioned Seats	25 "
Gallery	25 "
Gallery for Colored persons	50 "

The Company will perform at the following places:  
Monday 18. Mt. Carmel at 2 & 7 p. m.  
Tuesday 19. Vincennes at 2 & 7 p. m.  
Wednesday 20. Russellville at 2 & 7 p. m.  
Thursday 21. Hudsonville at 2 & 7 p. m.  
Friday 22 at Darwin at 2 & 7 p. m.  
April 3, '53 33 St.

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## CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a fast message unless its deferred character is indicated by the proper symbol.

# WESTERN UNION

## TELEGRAM

W. P. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT

## SYMBOLS

DL=Day Letter

NL=Night Letter

LT=International Letter Telegram

(40)

The filing time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

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1957 OCT 31 PM 1 14

S EGA159.PD=ELGIN ILL 31 1238PMC=

LIBRARIAN EMMELINE FAIRBANKS=

=MEMORIAL LIBRARY TERRE HAUTE IND:

=CANAL PICTURE ORDERED OCT 21 LETTER MUST REACH ELGIN  
ILLINOIS NOV 4 OR CANCEL:

=MADELINE SADLER WAGGONER=

Wabash & Erie  
CANAL



March 6, 1958

Mrs. E. G. Waggoner  
140 South Porter Street  
Elgin, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Waggoner:

I was delighted to receive the copy of your book THE LONG HAUL WEST. I am glad you managed to include the circus-boat picture even though I could not furnish you a print. The former librarian remembers seeing the poster, but that is as far as I get.

It is good to have a book of this kind and I know the copies we have ordered for our collection will be read with interest by many of our townspeople. Thank you again.

Sincerely yours,

Stillman K. Taylor,  
Librarian

SKT:dt

October 29, 1957

Mrs. E. C. Waggoner  
140 South Porter Street  
Elgin, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Waggoner:

In reply to your letter of October 21 we have checked our files in the Indiana Room and also a large safe which often produces things we are after. I cannot find the circus boat reproduced opposite page 334 of Harlow's OLD TOWPATHS. I have asked older members of the staff, but Mr. Harlow's book was produced in 1926 and no one seems to know.

You certainly have our permission to use the picture if you can have a print made from the Harlow reproduction. I should think our permission would be sufficient though you might want to check with Appleton, Century Crofts Publishers.

I will inquire further. The Vigo County Historical Society may have a print; it is even possible that we still have it, but I have not located it.

Sincerely yours,

Stillman K. Taylor,  
Librarian

SKT:dt



140 So. Porter St.  
Elgin, Ill.  
Oct. 21, 1957

Librarian  
Emmeline Fairbanks Memorial Library  
Terre Haute, Ind.

Dear Madam:

I believe you have in your collections an old hand-bill or poster announcing the proposed visit of a circus-boat on the old Wabash and Erie Canal. This is the illustration that Alvin Harlow used on page 334 of his OLD TOWPATHS in 1923. And I would like to use it in a book of mine that will be published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in New York in February under the title THE LONG HAUL WEST.

In case you are willing to have an 8x10 glossy print of this made for me, I would need written permission for its use. And in case there are charges in addition to the usual photographers fee, I would like to know how much in advance. Otherwise, please order a print made for me as rapidly as possible, sending it and billing me at my Elgin address, enclosing a statement concerning permission for my use of it, and telling me how you wish your courtesy credit-line to read.

~~Are~~ <sup>Are</sup> there ~~any~~ other canal pictures in your collections --- of our western canals especially?

I shall greatly appreciate your kindness in helping me in this matter.

Sincerely,

*Madeline Sadler Waggoner*  
Madeline Sadler Waggoner (Mrs. E.C.)

If you have any other canal picture dealing with an Indiana, Illinois, or Ohio canal before 1850 or soon thereafter -- one that you feel is particularly clear and interesting and one that has not been used too often, please have an 8 x 10 glossy print made of it too -- to be mailed and billed to me. Providing I can have permission to include it also in my book, if it meets with Putnam's approval. And thank you again.

*m.s.w.*

# EARLY SHOWBOAT AND CIRCUS IN THE UPPER VALLEY

*All good wishes,  
Joseph S. Schick*

By

JOSEPH S. SCHICK



REPRINTED FROM  
**MID-AMERICA**

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA



## Early Showboat and Circus in the Upper Valley

In late years the study of the early theater in the Upper Mississippi Valley has received considerable attention, but certain aspects of the subject have been neglected. Thus in a recent summary article on theatrical activities in this region only brief mention is made of the early circus companies and there are no observations on the showboat.<sup>1</sup> But both forms of entertainment were closely related to the theater, and for a full picture of the known dramatic activity along the Upper Mississippi neither can well be overlooked. If the circus seems somewhat out of place in a discussion of the early theater, it may be pointed out that at least one travelling circus company in this area before the Civil War presented scenes from Shakespeare as a regular part of its entertainment; and most of the circus companies of this time produced spectacles of varying dramatic emphases which contribute in part to the history of the theater, if we are to accept Eaton's definition that "The theatre is wherever anybody gets up before a public and entertains them by pretending."<sup>2</sup> Further, such theatrical entertainments on the part of the circus may possibly have inspired, as the circus itself surely did, one of the famous incidents in the greatest of all Mississippi stories, *Huckleberry Finn*. But of all this, in due time.

The circus and the showboat in the years before the Civil War had much in common. Circuses often travelled on "showboats," but normally gave their performances on land; while the legitimate showboats that we know were on the Upper Mississippi at this time

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<sup>1</sup> Harold and Ernestine Briggs, "The Early Theatre in the Upper Mississippi Valley," *MID-AMERICA*, XXXI (New Series XX), July, 1949, 131-162.

<sup>2</sup> Walter P. Eaton, *The Actor's Heritage*, Boston, 1924, 44. Cited by Briggs, *loc. cit.*, 132.

commonly gave performances that savored more of the circus than of the theater. Although the circus was by no means an institution American in origin, the showboat was thoroughly American. During pioneer days it brought the delights of the theater to every city and hamlet of consequence along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and many of their tributaries; when the Civil War disrupted river traffic, the showboat almost disappeared. However, it revived quickly with the peace and enjoyed perhaps its greatest days in the last two decades of the century.<sup>3</sup> Widespread and popular though it was, the showboat remains unchronicled by historians.<sup>4</sup> But here

<sup>3</sup> With this later period we are not here concerned, but it offers a fresh and rewarding field of investigation to the scholar. As he uncovers the story of the popular showboats that plied the waters of middle America in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of this century, he will come upon such gloriously named boats as the *Golden Rod*, *Cotton Blossom*, *Daisy Belle*, *River Queen*, *River Maid*, *Water Queen*, *Valley Belle*, *Princess*, *Dixie*, *Sunny South*, *Wonderland*, *Dreamland*, *Majestic*, as well as the *New Era*, *Paris Pavilion*, *Markle's Floating Palace*, *Billy Bryant's Showboat*, *Price's Sensation*, and French's *New Sensation*. The last-named boat, owned by A. B. French, "King of the Showboatmen," was possibly the finest of all. It was destroyed by fire in 1900 at Elmwood Plantation on the Red River. In the great days of the showboats it was a common practice to tow the boats upriver in the Spring to Hastings, Minnesota (at the junction with the St. Croix River), and then float down the whole length of the river, finishing the season in the bayous and canals of Louisiana. Fourteen showboats are said to have survived to 1925. Random references to the later showboats can be found in certain of the volumes of the American Guide Series and in the Rivers of America Series. See also Herbert and Edward Quick, *Mississippi Steamboatmen*, New York, 1926, 331-334; Paul B. Pettit, "Showboat Theatre," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XXXI (April, 1945), no. 2, 167-175; Edward J. Eustace, "Showboat Must Go On," *New York Times*, May 10, 1936; Horace Reynolds, "Billy Bryant, Master of the Ohio," *New York Times*, November 14, 1937. Billy Bryant's *Children of Ol' Man River, the Life and Times of a Showboat Trouper*, New York, 1936, is of little historical worth. One can expect to find showboat activity at least on all the tributaries of the Mississippi and Ohio that were regularly navigable by steamboats. For an account of the navigable streams and of the low-water difficulties and high-water seasons, see Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, Cambridge, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, there is no mention of the showboat in the very extensive bibliography of American culture in the *Literary History of the United States*, edited by Robert Spiller et al., New York, 1948. Arthur Hobson Quinn, whose *History of American Drama*, 2 vols., New York, 1923, 1927, is a standard reference (chiefly concerned with the drama but in part with the conditions in which it was presented), ignores the showboat; William Carson, in his thorough study of the early years of the St. Louis stage, *The Theater on the Frontier, the Early Days of the St. Louis Stage*, Chicago, 1932, does not refer to it, though St. Louis from an early time was something of a center of showboat activity. Not all showboats were towed barges; some were regular steamers. But the steamboat historians have also largely neglected this colorful aspect of river activity. No help can be garnered from William J. Petersen's *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi*, Iowa City, 1937, or from Louis C. Hunter's most compre-



and there in early newspaper accounts and advertisements, and in the yellowed pages of memoirs and recollections of early actors, the showboat has not been wholly forgotten. Perhaps this essay will serve as a reminder to historians who have quite ignored this form of popular entertainment.

The showboat was a very natural development. We know that the earliest dramatic companies in the West travelled on the rivers;<sup>5</sup> these natural routes offered the easiest and quickest transportation for the troupes and their baggage of costumes, props, and scenery. Thus, in a sense, one might say that the very first boat carriers of Western Thespians were "showboats" of a sort. One commentator even speaks of Huck's log raft, carrying the Duke and the Dauphin, as a crude kind of Thespian float.<sup>6</sup> But the legitimate showboat, as we normally use the term, not only transported a troupe, but also had a stage and an audience room for performances on board. The invention of such a boat is generally attributed to William Chapman, Senior, an English actor who made his first stage appearance in this country at the Bowery Theater, New York, in 1828.<sup>7</sup> Not long after this he organized his own play company, made up largely of the members of his family, and headed for the West, giving performances in Pittsburgh, Louisville, and other towns. Sometime in the late twenties or early thirties, most probably about 1833, he had

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hensive study, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*. The present writer devotes a chapter of his book, *The Early Theater in Eastern Iowa*, Chicago, 1939, to showboat and circus activity in Davenport before the Civil War. It was that study which led to this expanded account; and this, in turn, may ultimately lead to a history of the showboat.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Keeler, *Vagabond Adventures*, Boston, 1872; Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, St. Louis, 1880; Solomon Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years*, New York, 1868; Ralph Leslie Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*, New York, 1925.

<sup>6</sup> R. E. Banta, *The Ohio*, New York, 1949, p. 343.

<sup>7</sup> Data on the Chapman Family and their early showboat may be found in Smith, *Theatrical Management*; Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life*; R. E. Banta, *The Ohio*; Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture*, New York, 1942, and her *Troupers of the Gold Coast, or the Rise of Lotta Crabtree*, New York, 1928; Arthur Hornblow, *A History of the Theatre in America*, Philadelphia, 1919; Ralph L. Rusk, *Literature of Middle West Frontier*; *The Ohio Guide*, New York, 1940; *Indiana*, New York, 1941; Pettit, "Showboat Theatre," *loc. cit.*

Another pioneer exhibition and theater showboat, which has been overlooked by the chroniclers, was that of John Banvard, later to achieve wide fame for his great panorama of the Mississippi. Banvard started with his boat from New Harmony, Indiana, December 18, 1834, and floated down the Wabash to the Ohio and finally to New Orleans. The adventure was short-lived. See *Banvard, or the Adventures of an Artist, an O'er True Tale*, London, 1848, and the unpublished MS. autobiography of Banvard in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. (Courtesy of Miss Kathryn Johnson, Manuscript Division.)

built in Pittsburgh a "floating theatre."<sup>8</sup> It was little more than a large flat-boat, with "a comfortable little house forward and a plain little hall . . . aft"; Sol Smith, a contemporary actor-manager, called it "a singular affair." A flag marked with the word "Theatre" flew from the roof of the hall. Inside, the seats for the patrons consisted of hard board benches stretching from one side of the boat to the other. At one end was a small stage "with a muslin curtain and tallow candles for footlights."<sup>9</sup> This was a far cry from the gaudy showboats which were to develop later, with their hundreds of gas jets, their crystal chandeliers, sparkling mirrors, and plush seats. Still, Chapman did not need to worry about these elegancies; what his boat lacked in the way of comfort or tradition, he more than made up for in the skill and freshness of his performances.

The Chapmans were a talented family and known to be gifted actors, but they never let the demands of their performances impinge too seriously on the joys of living; and high among their joys was fishing. When the catfish were biting, a play might well be brought to a halt for a good catch. Such interruptions were probably not unknown to other later showboats. Sol Smith recounts the Chapman family's fondness for this pastime, pointing out that when the actors were off-stage for an interval they would often drop a line "over the stern of the Ark."<sup>10</sup> More than one play must have been interrupted by a nibble. Smith writes of one such amusing incident:

... while playing *The Stranger* (Act IV, scene 1) there was a long stage wait for Francis, the servant of the misanthropic Count Walbrough.

"Francis! Francis!" called the Stranger.

No reply.

"Francis! Francis!" (a pause) "Francis!" rather angrily called the Stranger again.

*A very distant voice:* "Coming sir!" (A considerable pause, during which the Stranger walks up and down, à la Macready, in a great rage.)

"Francis!"

Francis (entering): "Here I am, sir."

Stranger: "Why did you not come when I called?"

Francis: "Why, sir, I was just hauling in one of the d...dest big catfish you ever saw!"

It was some minutes before the laughter of the audience could be restrained sufficiently to allow the play to proceed.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rusk, I, 397.

<sup>9</sup> Hornblow, I, 349.

<sup>10</sup> Solomon Smith, *The Theatrical Journey-Work and Anecdotal Recollections of Sol Smith*, Philadelphia, 1854, 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



There were other hazards to the performances, too, as we know from Sol Smith's account. At one time during a Chapman engagement at a small Indiana town on the Ohio, the floating theater was cast loose by some mischievous boys. The boat could not be moored for half a dozen miles, and the audience had to walk back to the village.<sup>12</sup> This first brave venture of a floating theater came to a close in 1840 with the death of the elder Chapman.<sup>13</sup> There is no record that the Chapmans ever ascended the Upper Mississippi, and it seems improbable that they did, for there were few settlements of consequence on the upper river during the thirties.

In the years before the Civil War, showboats appeared probably for the first time in the north during the early fifties. It was in this decade that the *Floating Palace*, the *James Raymond*, and the *Banjo* owned by "Dr." Gilbert R. Spalding<sup>14</sup> and Charles J. Rogers of the Spalding and Rogers Circus Company came to be familiar visitors at the settlements along the upper river; they also plied along the Ohio and some of its tributaries. Of these boats, the *Floating Palace* was the largest and most elaborately equipped; it had no propulsion of its own but was towed by a steamer, usually the *James Raymond*. The *James Raymond*, however, was not devoted solely to the business of hauling its more ornate partner, for it, too, was fitted up with a show-hall; and occasionally it operated independently.<sup>15</sup> The *Banjo* had its own power of propulsion; it was usually referred to as the *Steamer Banjo*.

More is known about the *Floating Palace* than about the other showboats. With its exterior bright with red and gold paint and with its lavish interior, it was considered "palatial" even when compared to the gorgeous river steamers of the period.<sup>16</sup> And a picture

<sup>12</sup> John Banvard recounts a similar incident of his showboat being cast loose during a performance. *Banvard, or the Adventures of an Artist etc.*

<sup>13</sup> Rourke, *Troupers of the Gold Coast*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> In the early newspaper accounts and advertisements the name is usually spelled Spaulding. But the form Spalding is unquestionably correct. He was originally a pharmacist in Albany, New York, and his name is listed in the directories there from 1839-1858 as Spalding. (Courtesy of Mrs. Clara M. McLean, Harmanus Bleeker Library.) Further, his name appears as Spalding on the enrollment records of the *Banjo* and the *James Raymond* in the listings of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, now preserved in the Industrial Records Branch of the National Archives, Washington, D. C. He gained his title of "Dr." because he could fill prescriptions, and appropriately he sported the medical man's heavy moustache and tapering beard of the period. Earl Chapin May, *The Circus from Rome to Ringling*, New York, 1933, 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> *Vide infra*, note 38.

<sup>16</sup> May, 77-78; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 30, 1916.

of it has survived.<sup>17</sup> This shows a large superstructure erected on a keel-bottomed barge. The structure was built well to the front of the supporting float and with a considerable free space at the stern of the barge; an overhang from the second level of the theater was supported with six pillars to the rear deck. Along either side of the boat were two rows of windows, thirteen in the lower and fourteen in the upper row, the extra window above being in the overhang. Between the lines of the windows were the words *FLOATING PALACE*. The rear of the theater contained the entrances; the main entrance was at the center, and on either side of the rear deck outside-stairs mounted to the upper level. The roof of the structure was rounded to the sides with a low railing about it. At the rear of the roof was probably located the chime of bells which served to herald the approach of the boat at each stopping place.<sup>18</sup> There were three flag masts—one extending from the front-center of the main structure, with an American flag and pennant; another from the center of the roof, with its flag carrying the words *FLOATING PALACE*; and the third extending from the stern of the barge, the flag decorated with a horse rampant and very likely the name of the Spalding and Rogers Circus Company. The boat was built in Cincinnati in 1851 expressly for show purposes.<sup>19</sup>

The interior arrangements of the *Floating Palace* consisted of a regulation-sized circus ring, a stage, and a large auditorium space; in addition there were offices, a museum room, a green room, some dressing rooms, and a stable for the horses used in the spectacles. There was also a large pipe organ which supplied some of the music for the performances. The audience chamber was spacious; estimates of its seating capacity range as high as 2,500 persons.<sup>20</sup> But

<sup>17</sup> This picture of the *Floating Palace* is reproduced on the cover of the *Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, XXXI (January, 1950), no. 1. Another illustration may be found in Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Towpaths*, New York, 1926, opposite p. 334.

<sup>18</sup> In later years a calliope was used to announce the arrival of the boat and to attract patrons. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 30, 1916. (Courtesy of Ethel L. Hutchins, Public Library of Cincinnati.) May, 78.

<sup>19</sup> Keeler, *Vagabond Adventures*, 172; Pettit, "Showboat Theatre," *loc. cit.*, 169. Pettit suggests that the *Floating Palace* was "about 110 feet long and 35 feet wide"; but this is wholly conjectural. The dimensions of the boat are not known. Since the *Floating Palace* did not run under its own power, no enrollments or licenses were required for it; and no records regarding it have been found in the papers of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation preserved in the National Archives.

<sup>20</sup> A. M. Smith, "Transporting the Circus," *Hobbies*, LIV (November, 1949), no. 9, 34. At a performance in St. Louis in 1852 it is said that 2500 persons watched a show on board the *Floating Palace*, many of them peering through the windows and paying a dollar for the privilege. *Missouri*, New York, 1941, 154.



this seems unlikely. A trustworthy newspaper editor of the time who had no great love for popular entertainment of this sort and who thus had no motive for exaggeration viewed the interior arrangements of the showboat and asserted that there were seats for 1800 persons, though, he said, as many as 2000 could be accommodated if necessary.<sup>21</sup> The dress circle and the "family boxes" were on the first level, enough for 800 spectators. The dress circle seats were all cane-bottomed arm chairs, reserved by number; the charge for them was fifty cents. The "family boxes" were cushioned seats for twenty-five cents. The gallery seated 1000; a special section of it was used by negroes. All gallery seats were twenty-five cents. The interior was lighted with gas. If there was a chill in the air, heat was provided with hot-water or steam pipes.<sup>22</sup>

The museum of the *Floating Palace* was very possibly located in the entranceway to the main auditorium. It was considered by one visitor to be "one of the most splendid museums ever collected."<sup>23</sup> If we are to have faith in this same observer, over 100,000 curiosities were on display here; these included stuffed animals and live animals. Perhaps the most spectacular stuffed animal was a giraffe; for liveliness there was a white bear. Surely this was no musty, staid museum hall, for here amidst the exhibits a puppet show was given, too. And there were performances by a Mr. Nellis, born without arms, and by Madame Olinga, a "beautiful and daring tight rope performer."<sup>24</sup> Along with these attractions was the mystery of the "Invisible Lady." This was a mechanical contraption consisting of a hollow brass ball with four trumpets protruding from it; the whole was suspended inside of a hollow brass railing. The curious would direct questions into the trumpets and would be answered mysteriously by a person hidden under the deck who spoke through the tubing.<sup>25</sup> The naïveté of the inventor of such a device can be matched only by the naïveté of the persons it attracted.

The *Floating Palace* along with the *James Raymond* carried a complement of about one hundred persons, entertainers and those connected with the running of the enterprise.<sup>26</sup> Included in this group was a regular stock company which was prepared to put on

<sup>21</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, June 9, 1853.

<sup>22</sup> *Wabash Courier* (Terre Haute), April 9, 1853; *Davenport Gazette*, May 19, 1853.

<sup>23</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 20, 1856. Cited by Charles H. Ambler, *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley*, Glendale, 1932, 325. Courtesy of Edith L. Rathbun, Ohio State Library.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.* See also Keeler, *Vagabond Adventures*, 172.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

"any play from *Hamlet* to *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*."<sup>27</sup> Unhappily the records of the straight dramatic performances have not been uncovered; the known performances appear to have been almost wholly of a circus nature. The surviving advertisements of the shows are grandiose in scope and surely suggest legitimate drama. They promised "equestrian, gymnastic, and dramatic talent. Music, drama, horsemanship. Mirth, magic, melodrama, equitation spectacles, pantomime, farce, and tragedy."<sup>28</sup> Often such announcements were grossly exaggerated, but spectators have recorded that what the *Floating Palace* advertised, it performed.<sup>29</sup> Among the entertainers were "Dan Rice with his merriest jokes,<sup>30</sup> a Robinson who could leap from his horse through hoops of fire and hoops of daggers, and a Mlle. Macarte, the Queen of the Arena."<sup>31</sup> A typical show put on by the "complete dramatic corps" was a "national drama" entitled *The Spirit of '76*. This introduced "thrilling scenes from the lives of the Revolutionary heroes: Old Put! General Washington! Mad Anthony Wayne! A grand living tableau in conclusion with the Father of his Country on his charger borne aloft in procession, on a platform, on the shoulders of his brave Continentals."<sup>32</sup> The *Floating Palace* played on the Upper Mississippi at least in 1852 and 1853.<sup>33</sup> Its career as a showboat ended with the

<sup>27</sup> I. B. Richman, *Ioway to Iowa*, Iowa City, 1931, 264.

<sup>28</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, August 5, 1852.

<sup>29</sup> The editor of the *Wabash Courier*, April 30, 1853, stated that the *Floating Palace* performances "came fully up to what it had advertised and professed to be and do... The performances, too, were excellent."

<sup>30</sup> Dan Rice (McLaren), 1823-1900, was one of the best known clowns (and circus owners) of his day. As early as 1844 he appeared on the Upper Mississippi, at Galena, where "he is said to have received \$1,000 per week." For details of his career, see Isaac J. Greenwood, "The Circus, Its Origin and Growth Prior to 1835," *Dunlap Society Series*, New York, 1898, V, 116; Edward Le Roy Rice, *Monarchs of Minstrelsy from "Daddy" Rice to Date*, New York, 1911, 42; Thomas A. Brown, *History of the American Stage*, New York, 1870, 309.

<sup>31</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 30, 1916.

<sup>32</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, August 5, 1852.

<sup>33</sup> The normal routine of the *Floating Palace* was to give an afternoon and evening performance at each stop, and it then continued to the next landing. Occasionally, two settlements might be visited in a single day. The progress of the showboat along the river may be judged by typical play-stops during the summer of 1853. In the latter part of April, 1853, the boat was on the Wabash, going as far north as Lafayette, with other stops at Terre Haute, Darwin, Hudsonville, Russellville, Vincennes, and Mt. Carmel. By May 16, 1853, it was well up the Mississippi, at Louisiana, Missouri, and at Hannibal on May 17. With intervening stops at La Grange, Tully, Warsaw, Keokuk, and other places, it reached Muscatine, May 25, 1853. At the end of May it attained its northernmost point for the summer, Galena (with performances May 30 and June 2, 1853), before returning down-river. Other stops were made at Rock Island, Albany, Savannah, Sabula, Fulton City, Lyons, Camanche, Port



opening of the Civil War. At the time it was in New Orleans where it was seized by the Confederate Forces and thereupon converted into a military hospital.<sup>34</sup>

The *James Raymond*, the towing steamer, was a side-wheeler of slightly over 274 tons, built in Cincinnati in 1853. The tonnage and the dimensions of the craft suggest a medium-sized boat for its day. It was 177 feet in length, thirty feet in width, and had a draft of five and one half feet.<sup>35</sup> Although it had but one deck, the space was fully utilized. There were staterooms for the entertainers and these rooms also served as dressing rooms. There were quarters for the crew, a galley, mess hall, and a laundry. However, this was not purely a utility vessel. It contained a concert saloon of "great elegance and convenience," called the "Ridotto." This was used for lighter entertainment. It was here that Ralph Keeler, an early actor in the West, performed with a full band of minstrels in his "jig and wench" dances.<sup>36</sup> The minstrels were probably Dave Reed's Minstrels who were on the *James Raymond* in the summer of 1856, led by Johnny Booker.<sup>37</sup> On occasion this steamer-showboat operated without the *Floating Palace*.<sup>38</sup> The Civil War brought an end to the entertainment activities of the *James Raymond*; it was seized by the Federal Government. But this was not a complete loss, for Spalding was paid 32,000 dollars for the boat. Liberally

Byron, Le Claire, Hampton, Moline, Davenport, Moore House Landing, New Boston, Oquawka, Pontusac, and Nauvoo. *Wabash Courier, Davenport Gazette, Hannibal Journal*.

<sup>34</sup> May, *The Circus*, 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> Enrollment records of the *James Raymond*, Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Industrial Records Branch of the National Archives, Washington, D. C. A summary of the official data follows: First enrolled at Cincinnati, October 15, 1853. Built of wood, "with a transom stern with tuck, no gallery, no figurehead, one deck, and no mast." Two boilers. Tonnage: 274 and 5/95. The first owners were Spalding and Rogers (each ½); Spalding was Master. The vessel was last officially enrolled at St. Louis, October 8, 1862; the owners then were William A. Adams and Joseph G. Adams (each ½) of St. Louis. William Adams, Master. The official records indicate that George Byron Merrick in his *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*, Cleveland, 1909, was in error in calling the vessel a stern-wheeler of 294 tons.

<sup>36</sup> Keeler, *Vagabond Adventures*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 20, 1856.

<sup>38</sup> The *James Raymond*, without the *Floating Palace*, gave performances at Davenport, May 26, 1858, (*Davenport Gazette*, May 20, 1858), and at St. Paul and at Stillwater, Minnesota, on the St. Croix River, about the middle of June of the same year. Presumably it performed at the intervening points on the river also; *Minneapolis Gazette*, June 22, 1858. (Courtesy of Don Woods, from Miss Kathryn Johnson, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.) See also Merrick, *Old Times*, 276. At the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861, the boats were operating separately; the *Floating Palace* was then at New Orleans, and the *James Raymond* was in the North. This is noted in the text.

he had President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton distribute the money to wounded soldiers and their families.<sup>39</sup>

The little *Steamer Banjo*, which had an audience chamber for 800 people, travelled as far north as St. Paul, even to Stillwater on the St. Croix River.<sup>40</sup> It was a vessel of slightly over 105 tons, built in Cincinnati in 1855, measuring 115 feet in length, twenty-five feet in width, and with a draft of four feet.<sup>41</sup> It had a capacious stage and adequate scenery, but it is doubtful if any legitimate plays were given. The very name of the boat suggests its speciality. And

<sup>39</sup> May, *The Circus*, 66. After the war the *James Raymond* was in the Memphis and Vicksburg trade. But early in 1866 it was tied up at Memphis "for several months for debts." It was sold for the creditors by the U. S. Marshall to Captain Campbell *et al*, April, 1866, for 8,500 dollars. Campbell reconditioned the vessel and then started for St. Louis early on the morning of April 24, 1866. Near Island No. 40 a boiler-head blew out and the boat caught fire. The damage amounted to about 2,000 dollars. The first engineer was killed and six or seven others seriously hurt. At this time the ship was valued at 15,000 dollars and was insured for 10,000 dollars. The wreck was ultimately towed to St. Louis and there burned at the wharf, June 2, 1866. Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, National Archives; *Missouri Democrat* (St. Louis), April 25, 1866.

<sup>40</sup> The *Banjo* was at St. Paul in 1856 and 1858. It was at Stillwater in 1858 also. Merrick, *Old Times*, 260; Richman, *Ioway to Iowa* 264; *Minneapolis Gazette*, June 22, 1858. *Vide supra*, note 38. When the *Banjo* was at Stillwater, mid-June, 1858, the *James Raymond* was with it. On this occasion the boats were approached by "a large party of men who manifested a determination to see the sights without the accompanying fee." Their free entry was successfully prohibited. But "when the exhibition closed and the boats were pushing out, a number of missiles were thrown into the boats with considerable violence, whereupon a number of shots were aimed upon the crowd... no one was seriously injured, though one or two persons received slight wounds." The *Minneapolis Gazette* deplored the incident: "The whole affair was disreputable... there was rashness on both sides." The attack on the *Banjo* and the *James Raymond* was not without precedent. Chapman's showboat was attacked by ruffians on the Arkansas River. Rourke, *Roots of National Culture*, 139. And Banvard's boat in 1835 withstood an assault of robbers with a display of gunfire. *Banvard, or the Adventures of an Artist etc.*

<sup>41</sup> A brief summary from the enrollment records of the *Banjo* follows: it was "full built" (of wood), with a square stern, a tuck, no gallery, and a plain head. First enrolled at Cincinnati, October 24, 1855. The owners then were John Mann of Dayton, Ohio ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ), William McCracken of Ohio ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ), and Spalding and Rogers of New York ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ). John Mann, Master. It was next enrolled at New Orleans, November 8, 1856. The owners then were Spalding and Rogers ( $\frac{3}{4}$ ) and William McCracken ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ). The vessel was not examined by the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation in 1857 or thereafter, and was "presumed abandoned during 1858." Industrial Records Branch, National Archives. Since too many years have passed for legal retribution, it may now be pointed out that the *Banjo* was not abandoned in 1858. On September 6 and 7 of 1860 it played at Kansas City with the "World's Star Minstrels," a company then including Sam Gardner, B. A. Cotton, J. W. Adams, Nick Foster, George W. Hill, P. Chatfield, T. Allen, J. Wainbold, and P. Campbell; Harold and Ernestine Briggs, "The Theatre in Early Kansas City," *MID-AMERICA*, XXXII (New Series XXI), April, 1950, 94.



the programs surviving support the impression that it gave a variety show of an essentially minstrel type.<sup>42</sup> Thus on one occasion it announced a performance of Ned Davis' Ohio Minstrels, with songs, jokes, ballads, operatic choruses, national melodies, negro eccentricities, along with dancers and danseuses.<sup>43</sup> At another time it advertised a burlesque dramatic troupe and a monkey circus, with acting dogs and goats; too, there were Donetti's Dissolving Views—apparently a kind of panorama. There was also the spectacle of a balloon ascension by one Eugene Godard.<sup>44</sup> This, by its nature, was largely a free show, but some money was garnered from it. The ascension took place from land, rather than from the boat. The preparations for the ascent, the inflation and adjustment of the balloon, were made inside a tent; those who wished to watch these preliminaries had to buy special tickets. The balloon had a "parachute attachment" to ease its descent after the hot air or gas had been exhausted.<sup>45</sup> Two popular entertainers who travelled for years on the *Banjo* were Jim Johnson (Gallegher), an old-time minstrel banjoist, and Ben Cotton, one of minstrelsy's immortals.<sup>46</sup> The regular entrance fee to the *Banjo* was twenty-five cents to all comers and to all seats. This minstrel showboat was on the Upper Mississippi during the summers of 1856, 1857, and 1858.<sup>47</sup>

The early showboats were closely associated with the circus in the type of entertainments that they presented. In turn, the circus companies of the forties and fifties often presented spectacles that suggest a link with the legitimate theater. Occasionally the circus invaded the precincts of the theater itself, especially in the form of equestrian displays. Thus in this period one finds the three forms of entertainment—showboat, circus, theater—often blended. Such mixed performances are mentioned several times in the rambling notes of Sol Smith, to whom the historian of the early theater is much indebted. His most striking observation on this matter concerns

<sup>42</sup> Mark Twain wrote an excellent description of the early minstrel shows of the forties and fifties which were probably much like those on the later *Banjo*. See Bernard De Voto (ed.), *Mark Twain in Eruption*, New York, 1940, 110-118.

<sup>43</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, July 4, 1856 and August 12, 1857; *Daily Iowa State Democrat* (Davenport), July 18, 1856 and August 11, 1856.

<sup>44</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, May 20, 1858.

<sup>45</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, May 20, 1858 and May 26, 1858.

<sup>46</sup> *Louisiana*, New York, 1941, 213.

<sup>47</sup> Keeler, *Vagabond Adventures*, 219; Merrick, *Old Times*, 261. Files of the *Davenport Gazette*, *Daily Iowa State Democrat* (Davenport); *Minneapolis Gazette*. Richman, *Ioway to Iowa*, 263-264, states that the *Banjo* was at Keokuk in May, 1855. But I find no evidence of this; the ship was not enrolled by the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation until October 24, 1855.

Caldwell's management of the St. Charles Theater in New Orleans in the early forties. Straight drama had had a barren season; this was remedied by Caldwell with the engagement of Fogg and Stickney's horse show, with the performances at first devoted solely to equestrian displays. After a month of this, Caldwell began to mix in dramatic pieces,

and the lovers of the legitimate who thronged the temple . . . were regaled with those finished productions of genius called farces, after witnessing the wonderful tricks of the horse Champion and listening to the refined songs (or national anthems) from a professor of Niggerology, interspersed with the chaste witticisms of the clown."<sup>48</sup>

If the circus thus invaded the theater on occasions, so too did the theater invade the circus.

Many of the early circus companies that travelled through the Middle West in the days before the Civil War regularly advertised the presence of "dramatic corps and pantomimists" as a part of their outfits. Among the spectacles given by these companies, we may note: *The Shoemakers of Bagdad*; *Ward's Mission to China*; *Lovers of the Rhine*; *St. George and the Dragon*; *The Shipwrecked Mariner, or a Voyage on Land and Sea*; *The Crusades*; *The Rich Turk, or the Big-Headed Family*; *China in Danger*; *Eastern Pastimes*; *Pocahontas Rescuing John Smith*, with the "Scalping Scene" and the "Death Song"; *The Arab Slave, or the Sultan's Halt in the Desert*; *The Countryman's Visit to the Circus*; *The Charioteer's Dilemma*; *Games at the Curriculum*; *The Tournament*; and *The Bedouins of the Desert*.<sup>49</sup> Many of these probably represented the gen-

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Theatrical Management*, 161. For further notes on the circus-theater relationship, see Smith, *The Theatrical Apprenticeship*, 92; Rusk, *Literature*, I, 382. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life*, *passim*. Herman Rosse, "The Circus Theatre," *Theatre Arts Magazine*, VII (July, 1923), no. 3, 228-243.

<sup>49</sup> These circus spectacles were given in Davenport, Iowa, in the years before the Civil War. For complete data see the writer's book, *The Early Theater in Eastern Iowa*, 31-37. For a bit of guidance to any future historian of the circus, the following representative list of the more prominent circus companies that played in Davenport from 1838-1862 may be helpful: The American Arena Co., Howe and Mabie's Co., Dan Rice's Co., Spalding's North American Circus, Grand Olympic and United States Circus, Stokes' Co., Southwestern Circus, Crescent City Circus, Stickney and North's Co., Crane's Oriental Circus, Raymond's Menagery (*Vide infra*, note 51), Railroad Circus, Sands-Nathan's American Circus, Van Ambrugh and Co., Den Stone's Co., Tyler's Circus Exhibit, N. Buckley and Co., Levi J. North's National Circus, Yankee Robinson's Circus, H. M. Smith's Co., Bailey and Co., Driesbach's Circus and Menagery, Lent's Circus, Nixon and Kempe's Great Eastern Circus, Antonio-Carroll and Co., Smith's Great Western Circus, New Orleans Circus, Antonio Bros. Co., Sands' Circus and Homopical Amphitheater, De Haven's Union Circus, Mabie's Circus. Files of the *Iowa Sun* and *Rock Island News* (courtesy of Father Griffith, St. Ambrose College), *Davenport Gazette*, *Daily Iowa State Democrat*, *Daily Morning News*, *Der Demokrat*, in Davenport Public Library.



eral theme of the performers' grand entry, but very likely some of them were in semi-dramatic form, and a few may conceivably have been legitimate play performances. At least all had elements of "pretending before an audience." Several of these circus pieces were advertised in the usual contemporary theater fashion, "with a most laughable comic afterpiece." This may have been merely a carry-over from the usual theater jargon, but the actuality which it suggests may have been carried over, too.

Certainly one of the most interesting historical items unearthed in a study of the early circus along the Mississippi was the notice of H. M. Smith's Circus Company which visited Davenport, Iowa, for two performances on July 12, 1856.<sup>50</sup> The announcement of the circus stated that scenes from Shakespeare were to be presented: sketches from *Falstaff*, and scenes from the *Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*. These were but a part of a varied program which ran briefly as follows: there was to be a military brass and string band; ground and "lofty" tumbling; a fancy dance by Mlle. Victoria Smith, danseuse; a "burlesque imitation of the most distinguished personages of the age, drawn from reality;" a piece entitled *The Countryman's Visit to the Circus*; and *The Shipwrecked Mariner, or a Voyage on Land and Sea*; trick ponies; the Duplicate Ladders—two ladders held upright by one man while three others mounted to the tops, "forming themselves into beautiful pictures, classic positions, etc., as taken from ancient statues;" the Flying Indian—a trapeze performer; and the whole to conclude with the "very amusing and laughable afterpiece of *The Shoemakers of Bagdad*." Throughout, "Ethiopian Minstrels" entertained on the side. There were no wild animal displays.<sup>51</sup> The scenes from Shakespeare were presented between the antics of the trick ponies, Black Diamond and Cincinnatus, and the feat of the Duplicate Ladders. We can be reasonably sure that Shakespeare performances by the travelling cir-

<sup>50</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, July 7, 1856. The announcement and program of H. M. Smith's Circus Company is reproduced on the inside back cover of the *Palimpsest*, XXXI (January, 1950), no. 1.

<sup>51</sup> A point on word usage seems worth making here. The travelling tent companies devoted to equestrian acts, acrobatics, pantomimes, comedy, etc., were generally advertised as *circuses*. Companies that specialized in animal exhibits were more often called simply *menageries*. Rarely were the two types blended as they are so frequently today. An interesting note on this distinction was made by the editor of the *Davenport Gazette*, July 18, 1850. Speaking of Raymond's Menagery, he wrote: "The agent [of the company] informs us that there is no circus nor negro pantomime connected with it." A rarity was such a company as that of Herr Driesbach, advertised as a "circus and menagery"; *Davenport Gazette*, August 1, 1856.

cus companies were not common; this is the only instance of them that I have come upon in this area.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, they could not have been exactly rare either; at least, no one at this time considered the event sufficiently remarkable for comment. As one reflects upon this rather unusual instance of Shakespeare under the "Big Top," the circumstance brings to mind that great book about life on and along the Mississippi and perhaps throws a new light of appreciation and understanding upon it—Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

Every reader of Twain will recall at once the famous soliloquy of Hamlet, "To be or not to be," as the Duke of "Bilgewater" taught it to "Louis XVII." It is a strange mingling from several of the plays, but it must have been wondrously impressive for all that, at least to an unlearned audience; and particularly impressive if they gave Shakespeare in the same spirit and manner that the Duke used in teaching it to the King. He "read over the parts in the most splendid spread-eagle way, prancing around and acting at the same time, to show how it had got to be done." Perhaps it is no coincidence that on the afternoon preceding the evening Shakespearean "revival" in the little "Arkansaw" town, Huck "dived" under a circus tent to see "a real bully circus." He describes the entrance parade of the performers as "the splndidest sight that ever was . . . a powerful fine sight." Then followed a show of horsemanship which was interrupted by a drunkard who insisted on an opportunity to show his riding skill. And, of course, the sot ultimately sheds his rough outer clothing, and when he tops the horse in sober triumph he reveals himself "dressed the gaudiest and prettiest you ever saw," as one of the regular performers. From this account Huck feels no need of transition to: "that night we had *our* show"—the sketches from Shakespeare. The Duke and the King gave the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the broad-sword conflict from *Richard III* (a piece that Smith's Circus Company also used), and Hamlet's soliloquy. Perhaps these performers with their "rip, rave, and grit" were not wholly imaginary after all, and so quite in keeping with Huck's tongue-in-cheek judgment of his creator: "He told the truth—mainly." Perhaps they were modelled upon some such circus Shakespeareans, not unlike those of Smith's Company, that Twain had seen and heard as a boy in Hannibal, Missouri.

<sup>52</sup> For a brief but adequate summary of Shakespeare performances under rather crude circumstances in the early West, see Esther C. Dunn, *Shakespeare in America*, New York, 1939, pp. 175-204.



That the "Arkansaw lunkheads couldn't come up to Shakespeare" is not too surprising. "What they wanted was low comedy—and maybe something ruther worse than low comedy." The lunkheads were far more accustomed to the sights of the circus than they were to Shakespeare. Many of the early circuses were clearly disreputable, consisting of "scrawny animals, minstrel shows, and an occasional obscene act." (Remember the "Royal Nonesuch" that Huck tells about?). Their advertising was made up of "bold and false assertions of having 'over 250 men and horses' and other such base Imposition, Claptrap, and Humbug."<sup>53</sup> In the light of this, Smith's Company with its scenes from Shakespeare must have been a welcome change, appealing to a considerably higher level than the usual circus audience. Those who may have had their doubts about the performance were assured that "everything advertised will be performed."

If a history of the circus in the Middle West should ever be compiled and if the full story of the showboat is ever recounted, we shall see clearly the relationship of these two popular forms of entertainment, one to the other and to the early theater in this region. No history of the theater in middle America can be complete without a note on these marginal attractions which caused the people to leave their fields and shops and to desert the lecture halls—all to see the "show," circus or showboat, both of which were far closer to the great masses of people than the legitimate theater. An observer said almost a hundred years ago of circus performances, and his words apply equally as well to the showboats, they were "a kind of peoples' amusement, and as such they will draw crowds, and all the talk and moralizing in the world won't prevent it."<sup>54</sup> Both types of amusement deserve serious consideration in the history of the American scene.

JOSEPH S. SCHICK

Indiana State Teachers College  
Terre Haute

<sup>53</sup> *Davenport Gazette*, July 25, 1850.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, May 20, 1861.

JOHN BAKELESS  
GREAT HILL  
SEYMOUR, CONN., R. F. D. 2

26 October 1959

Dear Madam:

I am at the moment engaged in writing a sequel to my 1950 book, "Eyes of Discovery." That book tried to describe North America as the white man found it. I am now trying to describe North America as the white man has made it -- sometimes a rather gloomy tale.

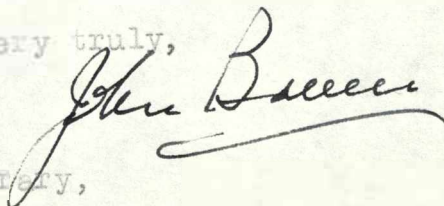
As part of this, I am doing a chapter on life a-float inland on American rivers and canals and am trying to describe some of the floating libraries, waxwork museums, and "show boats." The latter were mainly confined to the rivers; but Mr. Alvin F. Harlow, in his "Old Towpaths" (1928),, opposite p. 334, says that you possess a showbill of the Spaulding and Rodgers Circus Co., whose "Floating Palace" circus boat visited Terre Haute, Mt. Carmel, Vincennes, Russellville, Hudsonville, and Darwin. Mr. Harlow says this circus "once tours for some distance along the Wabash & Erie Canal," but so far as I can see these towns are all along the Wabash and the circus boat was merely pushing up that river as far as Terre Haute.

Can you tell me whether this craft actually pushed out into the canal proper? The only map in my possession makes the Wabash & Erie canal begin at Terre Haute, running NE. I realize, of course, that the river also carried traffic.

If you have further materials relating to the canals or to show and circus boats, I shall be glad to be informed. I take the final line on Mr. Harlow's picture, "April 9, '53 33 St," to mean the circus made this trip in 1853. Is this correct? And, if so, what is "33 St." -- certainly not an address in Terre Haute, the only town large enough to have a 33rd Street, and even this seems improbable in 1853.

It is too bad to trouble you with this but experience shows that only local librarians on the spot can save a writer from bad local errors. Any help you can give will be sincerely appreciated.

Ever very truly,



Reference Librarian,  
Fairbanks Memorial Library,  
Terre Haute, Indiana



JOHN BAKELESS  
GREAT HILL  
SEYMOUR, CONN., R. F. D. 2

INDIANA ROOM  
22 Nov. 1959

Dear Miss Ross:

Thank you very much for your suggestions with regard to the canals. I'll follow them up as soon as I can get over to the Yale Library. It is very kind of you to take so much trouble on my behalf.

Very truly,

*John Bakeless*

Miss Elizabeth C. Ross,  
Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library,  
Terre Haute, Indiana

WABASH + ERIE  
CANAL

REFERENCE ROOM  
PAMPHLET FILE

DO NOT  
REFERENCE

Mr. John Bakeless  
Great Hill  
Samour Conn.

November 13, 1959

Dear Mr. Bakeless:

We are interested to hear of your prospective new book, and I hope the information I have will be a help to you. Bradsby's History of Vigo County, Indiana (Chicago, Nelson, 1891) says that the canal was completed as far west as Terre Haute in 1850, and the water was turned in the latter part of May. Wm. J. Ball was the resident engineer. He was brought to Terre Haute to engineer the building of the canal, which was continued on as far as Worthington and Evansville, where it was opened in 1852. This was the "Terminus" of the canal - as Bradsby calls it - not the start. The Rothschilds withdrew their financial support in 1858, and various ones of the leading men of Terre Haute, including Chauncey Rose, W. D. Griswold, and General Charles Cruft formed a company to keep it open for local traffic. However, it only operated for about 2 years after this since the advent of the railroads provided too much competition, and the canals gradually disappeared.

After 1860, the section of the canal south of Terre Haute was no longer used. In 1875 the last part open to operation was in the neighborhood of Lafayette and it was discontinued in that year. That part of the canal between Fort Wayne and New Haven was used as late as 1878 for transportation of firewood into Fort Wayne.

I have been able to find mention of the Spalding and Rodgers Circus boat in only two of our books beside the Harlow book Old Townships. These are The Ohio River Handbook and Picture Album, ed. and pub. by Benjamin and Eleanor Klein, c1954; and The Long Haul West by Madeline Sadler Waggoner. (Putnam c1958). Both have only the picture you mention in Harlow's Old Townships. Regarding that showbill - it was in our possession some time ago, but we have been unable to locate it. In fact we gave Mrs. Waggoner permission to have a print made from the Harlow reproduction.

We are certainly happy to give you our permission to have a print made as she did, but perhaps you need permission from the publishers too.

As for that final line on the picture "Apr. 9, '53 33 3T", I thought perhaps it did not even apply to Terre Haute, since the show was advertised for the 23d of April in Terre Haute, and was to spend a day each at the other towns listed on the way. I wondered whether the line referred to the place where the poster was made. Or perhaps its 33 3st - which is possible as the canal came along the river south to Eagle St., and thence northeasterly to 3rd and canal streets.

The library has in its possession one other relic of early canal days - a poster giving rules and specifications and advertising for laborers on the canal. (1847)

If we may be of further assistance to you please advise us. I wonder whether you have had any correspondence with Mr. Joseph H. Iglehart of Evansville, Ind. He is quite an authority on early Indiana history and might be able to give you further information. His address is 1200 S.E. Riverside Dr. Evansville, Indiana.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth C. Ross  
Reference Librarian



*Wabash River*

Community Affairs File

IN-PERSON OR TELEPHONE REQUEST

Date 4-10-70 Staff member taking request B. Martin

Subject:

Photograph suitable for printing in a book of an advertisement for Spalding and Rodgers Circus Boat, April 23, 1853.

Purpose:

see above

Name John A. Darden (J. B. Lippincott Co.)

Address East Washington Square, Philadelphia, Pa. 19105

Zip Code

Phone

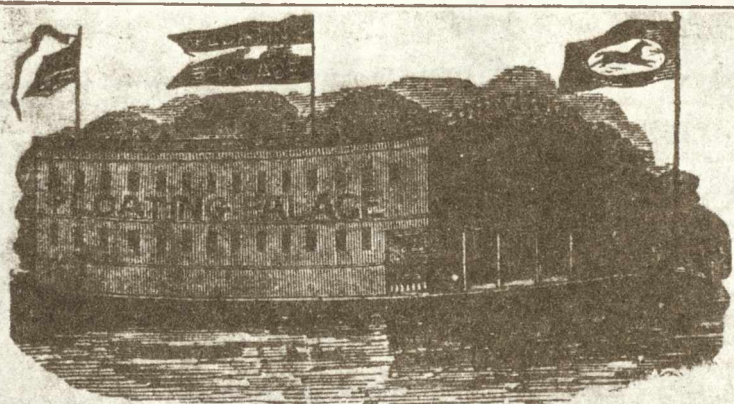
When material needed no date given

OLD  
This picture appeared in Alvin Harlow's TOWPATHS , and in ALBUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, vol II, page 409. It appears to have been copied from an ad which was printed in the WABASH COURIER, April 23, 1853. Made mf print of the ad., telephoned Stewart Martin about the possibility of making photography from MF. He has not the equipment for making such copies, but said that he could copy the picture from the book. (Harlow) This would cost 2.75 for a 5x7 print. Telephoned 3M and was told that they had no way of printing anything but a printout such as our machine makes. This would be unsatisfactory for printing in a book.

(Correspondence on this subject filed under Wabash River in pam file.)

REFERENCE  
DO NOT CIRCULATE

Vigo County Public Library



## SPALDING & RODGERS CIRCUS CO ON BOARD FLOATING PALACE,

Will Exhibit in Terre Haute on Saturday, April 23d, at 2 and 7 o'clock, P. M.

### PRICE OF ADMISSION.

Dress Circle, all armed Chairs.....	50 cts
Family Boxes, Cushioned Seats.....	25 "
Gallery.....	25 "
Gallery for Colored persons.....	50 "

The Company will perform at the following places:

Monday 18. Mt. Carmel at 2 & 7 p. m.

Tuesday 19. Vincennes at 2 & 7 p. m.

Wednesday 20. Russellville at 2 & 7 p. m.

Thursday 21. Hudsonville at 2 & 7 p. m.

Friday 22d at Darwin at 2 & 7 p. m.

April 23, '63 23 St.

Courtesy of the Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute, Indiana

A FLOATING CIRCUS OF ANTE-BELLUM DAYS WHICH ONCE TOURED FOR  
SOME DISTANCE ALONG THE WABASH AND ERIE CANAL



From "Harper's Magazine"

A DRIVER AND TEAM OF 1860



PAMPHLET FILE

INDIANA ROOM

April 10, 1970

Wabash River  
(Showboats)

J. B. Lippincott Company  
John A. Darden  
Dl-High Department

Dear Mr. Darden:

I am writing in response to your letter of April 2, requesting a photograph of an advertisement for Spalding & Rodgers circus which was printed in the "Album of American History", vol.II, page 409.

This picture is from an old newspaper, the "Wabash Courier", April 23, 1853, page 3. At this time, these old newspapers are available only on microfilm, so I am afraid that we cannot fill your request. We have a microfilm reader-printer, but you can see that the print it makes would be of no use to you. Our local photographer cannot make a print from the microfilm as he does not have the equipment for enlarging, and because this is a positive film - not negative.

The picture also appears in Alvin C. Harlow's "Old Towpaths", originally published by Appleton, and reprinted in 1964 by Kennikat Press. This is a more complete copy than appears in the "Album of American History". The local photographer said that he could make a 5x7 copy of the picture in the Harlow book for \$2.75. But perhaps you could do that yourself from a copy in the Philadelphia Public Library, or by contacting the publishers. You would probably have to get their permission anyway.

If we can help you further, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth C. Ross  
Hd. Local History Department

Vigo County Public Library

4/10/1970

# J. B. Lippincott Company



Educational Publishing Division

East Washington Square • Philadelphia, Pa. 19105

Phone: (215) WA 5-4100 • Cable: Lipcot

PAMPHLET FILE

INDIANA ROOM

April 2, 1970

Librarian  
Emeline-Fairbanks Memorial Library  
Terre Haute, Indiana

Dear Sir:

In 1971 we shall publish two textbooks in American history. The authors of these books will be Dr. John E. Wiltz, University of Indiana, Dr. Harold H. Negley, Indianapolis Public School System, and Dr. Leonard F. Ralston, State University of New York.

For illustration of these textbooks, we are interested in obtaining black and white photographic prints and/or transparencies (or photographic color prints suitable for reproduction) of the subjects described on the attached sheet.

It is our understanding that the originals of these illustrations are in your collections, and we should very much appreciate your informing us if photographs (or transparencies, etc.) can be made available to us for use in illustrating our books.

If you will inform us of the cost, conditions for use, etc., we should appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience so that we might make arrangements to obtain these illustrations.

Sincerely,

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

John A. Darden  
El-High Department

JAD:nd  
enc.

Vigo County Public Library

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM Emeline-Fairbanks Memorial Library

wanted for history books to be published by J. B. Lippincott Company  
(Wiltz-Ralston-Negley).

We should like to obtain a black-and-white photograph of the item listed below.  
Enclosed is a xerox of the photo we are seeking.

Advertisement for Spalding & Rodgers circus for a show on April 23, 1853,  
in their Floating Palace at Terre Haute on the Wabash River



PAMPHLET FILE

INDIANA ROOM

October 30, 1963

Miss Julia Grehan  
American Heritage Magazine  
55 E 5th Ave., New York

Dear Miss Grehan:

In regard to your telephone call yesterday in which you requested a copy of the Spalding & Rodgers Circus Co. poster which appeared in Harlow's "Old Towpaths", I am terribly sorry to have to tell you that the original is no longer in the possession of the library.

I had a verifax copy of the picture which appears in the book made for you, but doubt whether it will serve the purpose. At any rate, I am enclosing the copy, and am just sorry that we can do no better.

The library gave the Vigo County Historical Museum many of the historical odds and ends which it formerly owned. Among these is an account book of the Packet "Eliza", and if you are interested in a picture of this, perhaps Miss Juliet Peddle might be able to help you, as she is very active in the Vigo County Historical Society. Her address is 2117 N. 10th St., Terre Haute.

I hope that we may hear from you again when we are better able to assist you.

Sincerely,

Garry Archer 235-8923

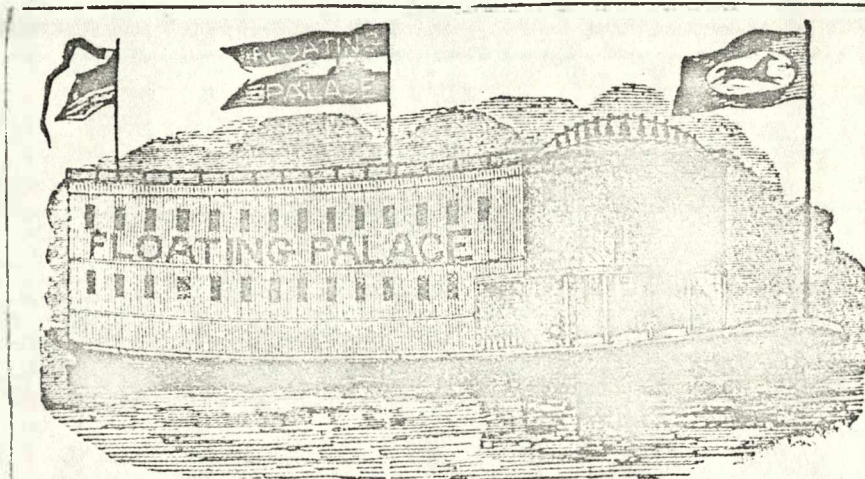
Elizabeth C. Ross  
Reference Librarian

Vigo County Public Library



**Showboats**

had cruised the western rivers since the 1830's.



**SPALDING & RODGERS CIRCUS CO**  
**ON BOARD FLOATING PALACE,**

Will Exhibit in Terre Haute on Saturday, April 23d, at 2 and 7 o'clock, p. m.

**PRICE OF ADMISSION.**

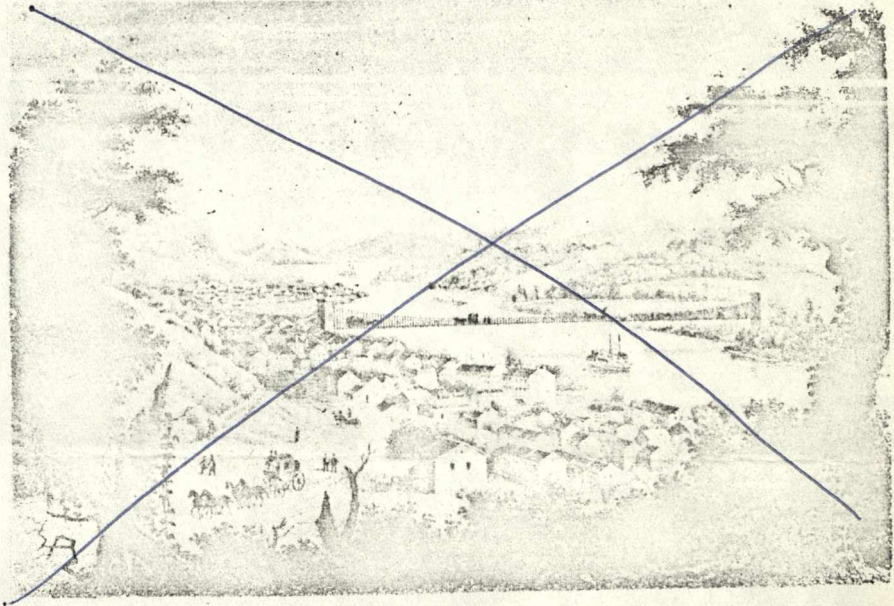
Dress Circle, all armed Chairs.....50 cen  
Family Boxes.....  
Galle.....

Courtesy, Emeline Fairbanks Memorial  
Library, Terre Haute, Ind.

Opposite we see the well-known circus of Spalding & Rodgers advertising a show on April 23, 1853, in their Floating Palace at Terre Haute, Ind., on the Wabash River.

**Wheeling**

where the Cumberland, or National, Road (see pages 189-90 and 267) crossed the Ohio, dedicated a suspension bridge in 1849. In the lower left part of the view the National Road is seen winding up the hill—eastward bound.



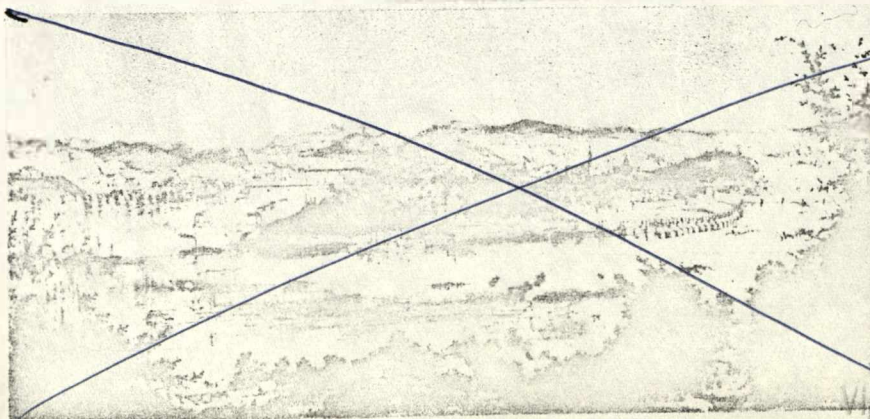
WHEELING IN VIRGINIA

Charles A. Dana, *The United States Illustrated*. 1853

**Pittsburgh**

at the Forks of the Ohio, was by 1849 showing unmistakable signs of its future industrial eminence.

Courtesy, Stokes Collection, The New York  
Public Library



November 23, 1977

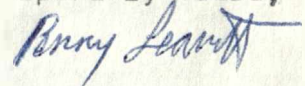
Vigo County Public Library  
222 N. 7th St.  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47807

Dear Sirs:

I am presently collecting information for my doctoral dissertation, the subject of which concerns G.R. Spalding and C. Rogers showboat, The Floating Palace. This showboat operated between the years 1851-1862. In the course of my research, I have found that the Floating Palace visited Terre Haute in April or May of 1853.

I am writing you in hope that your library might have some information on the performances, etc., of the Floating Palace. It is entirely possible that the showboat made more than just one stop at Terre Haute during its other tours. I have been referred to you through the Vigo County Historical Society. Your assistance in this matter would greatly help my research. Any findings may be sent to the address listed below. I am,

Hopefully Yours,



Penny Leavitt

\*I919 Burton Dr. # I76-B  
Austin, Texas 78741



# 'Floating Palace' excited local residents

By John Hanners

Sp SEP 3 1977

When America's greatest showboat pulled into Terre Haute in 1853, frontiersmen, farmers, and townspeople flocked down to the Wabash River to see her. She was the most stupendous, colossal showboat ever. She was the "Floating Palace," and there had never been anything quite like her.

The building of the "Floating Palace" showboat in Cincinnati in 1851 solved a unique problem for Dr. Gilbert R. Spalding. Dr. Spalding (the "Dr." was his own invention) inherited a complete circus from a man who was heavily in debt to Spalding's Albany, New York, paint and drug store. Charles J. Rogers, a horse rider in the circus, bought a part interest in the show, providing Spalding with much-needed business expertise. For a while the two operated a typical tent circus, but moving people, animals and equipment overland through the Midwest was a hazardous and expensive enterprise. Spalding then struck upon the idea of building a giant boat capable of holding a complete circus on board and plying her up and down the great rivers of America.

Spalding and Rogers' "Floating Palace" was the result, and she was a sight to behold. She had no power of her own, and the "James Raymond", a small steamboat, towed her to Terre Haute. Approximately 100 feet long and 35 feet wide, the "Floating Palace" looked like a large box sitting on top of a keel-bottomed barge. The outside was painted in bright reds and gold.

The "Floating Palace's" Terre Haute performances were given at two and seven p.m. on April 23, 1853. Admission was 35c for the gallery and cushioned seats; 50c for armed chairs.

The interior that greeted Terre Hauteans contained not only a regulation-sized circus ring, but a large theatre and museum as

well! She could hold an estimated 2,500 persons; steam pipes kept them warm if it were winter and gas light illuminated the inside. The fittings and appointments were declared the most luxurious that Midwesterners had ever seen.

In 1853, Dan Rice, an ex-Ohio jockey who rose to become the most successful clown in American history, headlined the circus. At the peak of his career Rice earned an estimated \$2,000 a week.

The theatre featured everything from "Hamlet" to "Ten Nights In a Barroom", although it isn't known if any plays were given in Terre Haute. For those tired of the circus and theatre, or waiting for the next show, there was the museum. Stocked with over "100,000 curiosities," one could see Madame Olinga or Mr. Nellis, born without arms, but who could "write, paint, or shoot a bow with the greatest of ease." Stuffed animals including a white bear and giraffe, were also on display.

Unfortunately for the "Floating Palace," she was in New Orleans when the Civil War broke out. She was seized by the Confederacy and converted into a military hospital; Spalding never received a cent for her. However, Spalding's luck held; the "James Raymond" was taken over by Federal troops in Cincinnati, and Dr. Spalding was awarded \$32,000 by the courts for her. But the "Floating Palace's" exciting career was ended.

Thirty years later showboats like the "Cotton Blossom," "Sunny South," "River Queen," and "Golden Rod" (listen to the music of those names!) earned their place in Ohio and Mississippi River history. Some found their way up the Wabash to Terre Haute, thrilling a new generation. But they were late-comers; "the one and only, original" "Floating Palace," with her onboard circus, size, and beauty, was the greatest of them all.

REFERENCE  
DO NOT CIRC

Wigo County Public Library

Community Affairs File

November 23, 1977

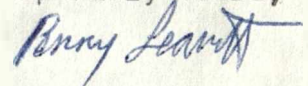
Vigo County Public Library  
222 N. 7th St.  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47807

Dear Sirs:

I am presently collecting information for my doctoral dissertation, the subject of which concerns G.R. Spalding and C. Rogers showboat, The Floating Palace. This showboat operated between the years 1851-1862. In the course of my research, I have found that the Floating Palace visited Terre Haute in April or May of 1853.

I am writing you in hope that your library might have some information on the performances, etc., of the Floating Palace. It is entirely possible that the showboat made more than just one stop at Terre Haute during its other tours. I have been referred to you through the Vigo County Historical Society. Your assistance in this matter would greatly help my research. Any findings may be sent to the address listed below. I am,

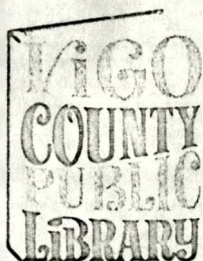
Hopefully Yours,



Penny Leavitt

\*1919 Burton Dr. # 176-B  
Austin, Texas 78741





December 1, 1977

Miss Penny Leavitt  
1919 Burton Dr. #176-B  
Austin, Texas 78741

Dear Miss Leavitt:

We have often had enquiries about the picture of The Floating Palace and the Spalding & Rodgers Circus Co. One of the early letters says it was an old handbill in the possession of the library. The exact picture is in an old newspaper, the "Wabash Courier", April 23, 1853, and I am sending a copy of it, and a couple of clippings about the performance. It was to have been in Terre Haute two different week-ends, but the advertisement only appeared once.

Copies of the picture appear in Harlow's Old Town-  
paths, The Ohio River Handbook and Picture Album, The  
Long Haul West, and the Album of American History.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth R. Merrill*  
Elizabeth R. Merrill  
Local History Division